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AUTHOR Fredrickson, Ronald H.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a guidance program for students who are multipotential people, i.e., they are able to adapt themselves and develop the necessary specific skills to perform well in a variety of occupations. The author disputes the traditional method of counseling wherein the counselor attempts to identify single talents of the counselee. Instead, he contends that today there is a premium on adaptability in today's world of work. Shifting manpower needs, the geographic mobility of industry, and automation all contribute to the importance of an need for vocational adaptability among today's work force at all levels. Research in the area of vocations has more often focused on permanence of choice rather than mobility and transition between occupational choices. Although, according to Super, "each person has the potential for success and satisfaction in a stated number of occupations," research in this area has been sadly lacking. A career counseling process which supports the concept of multipotentiality will be better able to help the client anticipate change in his career coupled with the need to develop other abilities. The author concludes by describing the multipotential approach as having five phases: (1) readiness, (2) awareness, (3) exploration, (4) reality testing, and (5) confirmation. (Author/HMV)

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Multipotential - A Concept for Career Decision Making

A new decision making approach is called for in which the counselor emphaszies the implementation of a particular occupational choice and deemphasizes the process which preceeds the choice.

Ronald H. Fredrickson

Doris J. Rowley

F. Ellen McKay

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Ronald H. Fredrickson is Professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts -- Amherst.

Doris J. Rowley and F. Ellen McKay are graduate students in counseling at the University of Massachusetts -- Amherst.

Multipotential - A Concept for Career Decision Making

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Harry, a high school senior is consulting with his counselor about what he is going to do vocationally after graduation. During the preceding years, Harry has taken a number of standard achievement and aptitude tests and interest inventories. They have all shown that he performed above the 50th percentile on achievement and aptitude tests. While there were differences among the individual test results, none seemed signigicant when the standard error of measurement of the tests was considered. The "flat" test profile, revealed that Harry could probably do a wide number of tasks well and was more a reflection of past opportunities to develop skills than it was a future prediction upon which his career decisions could be made.

The counselor in Harry's junior year had suggested that since he was unsure of an occupational choice, he might consider liberal arts in college. Then while in college, he might find something which he might wish to try after college graduation.

Harry and his counselor had little opportunity to get together outside of their annual sessions even though the counselor had wanted to do so. However, a check of his records indicated Harry planned to attend college and enter a general education program which was considered sufficient as a career choice. Once that line in the cumulative record listing "Future Plans" is completed, all seems well in the guidance office.

Harry in this case, is what we call "accident prone" in terms of career planning. He is uncertain and tests and inventories have given him little clue as to a specific area he might follow in career decision-making. He is vulnerable to chance happenings and the selection of a vocation becomes as predictable as the weather. But herein lies the irony of the whole question of appropriate occupational choice as will be demonstrated in this

article. Many individuals can seemingly rely on chance as they are able to adapt themselves and develop the necessary specific skills to perform well in almost any occupation. They are in this sense multipotential. A multipotential person is defined as any individual who, when provided with appropriate enviornments, can select and develop any number of competencies to a high level. Further discussion of the multipotential person may be found in the book Recognizing and Assisting Multipotential Youth (Fredrickson and Rothney, 1972).

Generally, career decision making has been a matter of identification of single talents, a narrowing down process. It is time that we look for different approaches and consider why the concept of multipotentiality appears valid for the career counselor.

Consistency of vocational choice in our society is viewed as a desirable product of career counseling. Inconsistency is usually accompanied by loss of time, loss of financial and educational resources, and limited ultimate achievement.

Inconsistency is usually defined as a change of vocational choice in which different training is required. Lateral transfer is not generally possible so it becomes a matter of starting at a lower level in a different occupational field. Inconsistency of vocational choice could imply the lack of adequate counseling, the inability to measure talent, or the planning of a career which could be executed.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of vocational counseling has customarily included an hypotheses on the consistency of career plans. The resources of the individual as well as society are at stake in the consistency of vocational choice. Consistency is accepted as a desirable goal -- it is in part the basis for society's rationale for training and utilizing career counselors in schools and agencies.

Consistency of vocational choice is something long sought after but seldom achieved. Census figures were used by Hutson (1962) to show the unrealistic number of high school students who indicated a professional occupational goal requiring a minimum of a baccalaureate degree. From a sample of 699 senior high school girls, 38.5 percent sought a professional goal. The proportion of junior high school girls desiring professional vocations was 64.5 percent of 605 sampled. The figures were similar for boys with 57.8 percent of 623 junior high school boys and 46.4 percent of 817 senior high school boys preferring professional occupations. This exceeds the general population census figures which show that only 12 percent of workers are in professional fields.

As part of a larger evaluation study on counseling effectiveness, Schmidt and Rothney (1955) followed 347 students from four Wisconsin secondary schools through senior high school and six months after graduation to record consistency of vocational choice. In this unique longitudinal study, they reported that of the 121 students (35%) who were consistent during high school, only 81 (23%) entered the preferred occupations. From those 168 students who were consistent over their junior and senior years, 82 (23%) entered the vocational area of their choice. One would have expected that choices made in the senior year would more likely be followed six months after high school but such was not the case. Twenty (41%) of the 48 who made a decision during their senior year entered that occupation after high school graduation.

Researchers working with the Project Talent Data bank point to inconsistencies in career choices (Flanagan and Cooley, 1966; Flanagan, 1973). Similar inconsistencies over time have been reported by Holland, 1963; Kohout, 1963; Warren, 1961; Davis, 1965; and Hind and Wirth in 1969. While the "why" of the inconsistencies are myriad and illusive to obtain, the exploration may

not be in terms of becoming more realistic in choices but rather in the individual's adaptability.

Adaptability

The human organism appears highly adaptable both physically and psychologically to its environment. Man can live and work in temperatures ranging from 45 below to 110 degrees above zero. He can work for hours in the heat of blast furnaces or in the cold of the meat packing refrigeration rooms. Man can work at sedentary indoor occupations or at heavy outdoor labor. Kitson (1925) says that in view of man's physical adaptability to such extreme conditions it is absurd to think that an individual is fit for only one occupation.

A more recent study (Bureau of Labor Statistics 1967) verifies Kitson's earlier study. Researchers found that "about 5 1/2 million of the almost 70 million Americans employed in January 1966 were working in an occupation different from the one they were in in January 1965. Sixty percent of those who changed were under 35 years of age."

There is a premium on adaptability in today's world of work. Shifting manpower needs, the geographic mobility of industry, and automation all contribute to the importance of vocational adaptability among today's work force at all levels. Today it is not uncommon to find college graduates as well as the unskilled on the unemployed list. The shifts from rural to urban living, blue collar to white collar, unskilled to technical occupations, employed to unemployed, change or early retirement, forty to thirty hour week, all make adaptability a means of survival.

A change that does not appear connected to one's work competence is evidenced in the difficulty employers and government services are having in encouraging workers to move to different parts of the country where the work is located. Need for adaptation comes not only from external manpower factors but

also from internal pressures and questions of personal happiness.

Research in the area of vocations has more often focused on permanence of choice rather than mobility and transition between occupational choices. Although it is generally understood in career counseling that, as Super (1953) says,..each person has the potential for success and satisfaction in a stated number of occupations," research in this area has been sadly lacking. Dealing more often with consistency of choice than with personal adaptability, one can only cite evidence: people do move from one job to another; and people do change from one vocation to another with apparent ease.

A career counseling process which supports the notion of multipotentiality will be better able to help the client learn to expect change in his career and anticipate the need to develop other abilities. In this way the individual will be able to control his own career plan and direction.

Career Decision Making for the Multipotential

A number of tentative assumptions may be proposed which suggest a multipotential approach to career decision making.

1. Individuals appear more variable than consistent in their vocational choices.
2. The higher the education attained, the less variable the individual is in occupational choice.
3. Individuals appear to be able to adapt to a wide number of job requirements and settings. It would appear that it may take just as much ability to adapt to one's original choice as to make and prepare for a different choice.
4. A multipotential individual may select a vocational choice almost at random and then set out to acquire the qualifications and characteristics that will make him successful in that career.

5. The actual occupational decision plays a minimal role in the total scheme of career planning. The actual process of implementation of that decision is of far more critical importance to the individual. Kitson (1925) speaks of "...vocational life as a process of evolution in which successful adjustment in one line of work may be but the preparation for another more exacting occupation." It is this successful adjustment which is the result of acquiring the qualifications and characteristics necessary for the job chosen and which often makes one job a stepping-stone to another.
6. An individual may be just as satisfied and sucessful in one occupation as another. Evidence about consistency of vocational choice probably raises more questions than it answers. However, evidence seems clear that a sizable majority of our youth change vocational choice or preference at least once before completion of formal education. Consistency appears related to the nature of the occupation preferred and the ability and personality of the individual.

The concept of multipotentiality requires a different examination of the procedures we use as counselors concerned with career decision making. It no longer appears appropriate to view vocational choice as a funneling or narrowing-down process. The activities of the counselor following the multipotential approach may be divided into five sequential phases. They are illustrated in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

The phases are as follows:

1. Readiness
2. Awareness

3. Exploration

4. Reality Testing

5. Confirmation

Readiness as the first stage in career decision making assumes that choices cannot be made and implemented without concurrent vocational maturity. Maturity, is that point where the individual gains the social, physical and psychological acceptance of the responsibility for implementing a career decision.

Too often the school system tells the individual when he should be ready as he selects subjects in the eighth and ninth grades. These course selections may preclude other career choices if certain subject options are not selected at the time. There is usually little opportunity to go back and pick up these options in most school programs.

The counselor and the school system must be sensitive to the degree to which this readiness may be fostered in terms of the world of work and living within that world. Readiness for vocational choice is that delicate point in time when assessment of self and the expectations of society appear compatible.

Awareness means two different but inseparable things in career development-awareness of self and awareness of the world-of-work. Awareness of the world-of-work provides a means to motivate and captivate the individual's interest in acquiring the attitudes and skills needed to develop a meaningful career. Time must be provided for the individual to learn about himself, his own values, goals, strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of others. Awareness of the career choices available must be integrated with self-knowledge. This is one of the unique functions the counselor can provide in career education programs. Awareness of occupations goes beyond the quick reading of occupational briefs. Awareness of life styles of people

in certain occupations is also an important prerequisite before further exploration can take place.

Exploration is a systematic and planned inquiry into the world of work with a wide review and examination of different occupations. A study of different job specifications and training requirements, labor regulations, hiring and tenure practices, social security regulations, and an analysis of job stereotypes would be some of the areas to be included in the exploration period. The final part of the exploration phase would be the selection of an occupation by level and field which the individual would like to initially enter or test out. For most vocational counselors this would be the end of the career decision making sessions - - a decision has been made. Since the individual meets the occupational specifications, it is recognized as a realisitic choice even though there may be a wide number of other occupations he may have been equally qualified to select.

Reality-testing of the occupational choice takes place through many means and is an essential part in finalizing a choice. The individual examines the risks he must take in order to achieve his occupational goal. Will he have the resources and personal drive to achieve that to which he aspires? The counselor can help the individual realize that meeting certain job requirements is not enough -- power in the form of resources, time, and personal energy are factors which must be risked to implement the desired occupational choice. If risks are determined to be too great by the individual, he may go back to exploration and review other occupational alternatives. Standardized testing and simulated career experiences, participation in career oriented extra-curricular activities (i.e.Health Club, Future Business Leaders of America), summer jobs, work-study programs, summer institutes and camps, and extended field trips are some of the reality testing activities which the counselor may plan with the

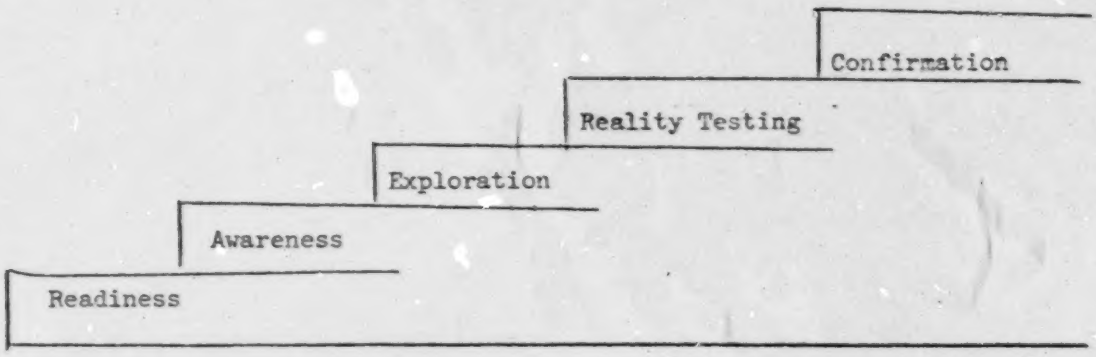
individual. The extent to which the counselor can create and arrange with the individual kinds of experiences which may come close to replicating the actual work experience to which the individual aspires the more likely will career choice be a satisfactory choice.

Confirmation is viewed as the particular time in which a career decision is confirmed. In this stage, the counselor works with the person in making his choice a successful one. The counselor with the individual arranges and pursues the acquisition of knowledge and skills which he needs to prepare for entry into his selected career area. The school counselor will need to extend his contacts with the individual beyond school-leaving or graduation. Follow-up and scheduled sessions for review of progress will be necessary. Arrangements for special remedial programs may become one of the counselor's activities. Involvement with parents and teachers will become essential as the counselor and individual work to maintain a persistent career plan.

Summary

The authors have attempted to demonstrate that a large proportion of our population is able to change occupations apparently without too much difficulty. This we believe is a reflection of the multipotential nature of the talents of many individuals. They are seemingly able to either follow their original choice or change to other choices. A concept of the multipotentiality of the individual would help the individual to anticipate changes and recognize them not as failures to measure up to the requirements of a previous choice but an awareness of his own plasticity and ability to adapt to a changing world of work.

Figure 1, Career Decision Making Following a Multipotential Approach



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